

God does not sing. Identification of participants in Psalm 75

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What voices can be heard in the Psalms? A great challenge of reading the poetry of the Psalms is the identification of participants. The major cause of this problem is a continual shift in person, number and gender (so-called PNG-shifts) in the text. To account for these shifts, scholars have always used an intuitive literary analysis. However, this exegetical tradition has led to diffuse and ad hoc explanations of: 1. Who the speakers are in the Psalms: a psalmist (Uchelen 1977), priest (Kraus 1978), king (Tate 1990), prophet (Ridderbos 1958; Terrien 2003), or God?; and 2. What the setting and genre is of these texts: e.g., liturgy or oracle? The current scholarly approaches therefore lack a systematic registration of patterns of PNG-shifts, as well as a methodologically adequate analysis.

To make a start with a more systematic analysis of PNG-shifts, we analysed Psalm 75 as an interesting case study. In this pilot project we used the annotated database of the Hebrew Bible prepared by the *Eep Talstra Centre for Bible and Computer* to help formulate an answer to one of the central interpretation problems of Ps. 75: the separation of human and divine speech. A linguistic four-step analysis was made. Firstly, data on person, number and gender of all verbs, pronomina and suffixes were gathered from the ETCBC-database and categorised. Secondly, since, the ETCBC-database does not contain identifications of participants, participants were identified manually by relating them to the most important persona in Ps. 75. Thirdly, we searched for patterns such as the 1pl.-1sg. shift as in “We [1pl., the community] give thanks to thee [God]... I [1sg, God] will judge with equity”. Fourthly, in order to formulate new ideas about the coherence and categorisation of the text of Ps. 75, we demarcated direct speech sections: e.g. an oracle by God is often not introduced by such but should be inferred by a change of speaker [God] into addressee [human].

The experiments did not in all respects meet the expectation and we learned valuable lessons that we will use in future research. Since the past project was only a pilot, we plan to do a more exhaustive analysis in the near future, taking into account the lessons we have learnt.

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